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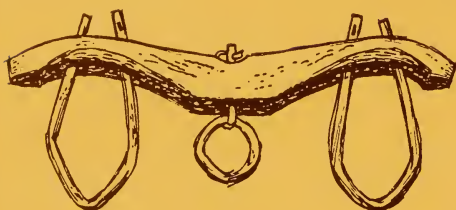
Lindstrom, Ralph G.

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1957

A Californian's Collection of Lincolniana

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*A CALIFORNIAN'S
COLLECTION OF LINCOLNIANA*





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A CALIFORNIAN'S
COLLECTION OF LINCOLNIANA

By Ralph G. Lindstrom
*President of the Lincoln Fellowship
of Southern California*



"THE LARGEST PRIVATE COLLECTION OF LINCOLNIANA ON THE PACIFIC COAST," said Jay Monaghan, Lincoln bibliographer, in giving his impressions of the collection formed by F. Ray Risdon, whom he has termed "the collector extraordinary of Los Angeles."

And Jay Monaghan should know—for, in the course of checking the leading libraries of Lincolniana throughout the country, he spent forty work hours in Risdon's library where he found many scarce titles and discovered several items not found elsewhere.

Now we know that these were understatements. Now, with the collection beautifully shelved in Occidental's Mary Norton Clapp Library, items and particularly ephemera not found elsewhere will be available to students.

But this collection was not formed in a day; it represents the accretions of many years of devotion to an ideal, and is still in process of growth and development.

Ray was slight of build at eight, and still is. One day during the campaign of 1896, while he was proudly wearing a McKinley ribbon, an arrant bully appropriated the badge to himself, and Ray never forgot the pangs which he suffered at the time of its loss. If it be that bullies have no purpose unless perchance to nerve endeavor,

and if their braggart cowardice changes latent power to potent purpose, that particular bully rendered an invaluable service by sparking a collector's purpose and by awakening in his victim a strength so developed in the years that have since passed as to illustrate how little slight physique can limit a spiritually purposeful man.

Yes, the bully *took* the political ribbon; but, in return, he *gave* to Ray the purpose to collect and treasure presidential material.

Would you become a fascinated collector and bibliophile? Then browse the book-stalls; go fishing for Lincolniana! Casting with the trained eye of consecrated purpose into shelf-pools flowing deep with currents of printed ideas and records, you fish—not with book-wormish, half-awake bobber-cork apathy, but with the sportsman's "flies" of discriminating taste, photographic memory, deep love for and appreciation of the beautiful in typography, in format, in binding; watchful of variants, patiently persistent in locating rare items, and recognizing them upon their coming to the surface. These were the latent talents of an embryonic collector at eighteen years. In full-blown maturity they became positive genius!

Once only did Ray place a rare item out of atmosphere in special binding. At Dawson's Book Shop—his favorite rendezvous ever since graduation from Los Angeles High School in 1906—young Risdon found a stitched but unbound early imprint of the *Political Debates between Hon. Abraham Lincoln and Hon. Stephen A. Douglas* (Columbus, Ohio, 1860). The price was only \$1.00; but Ray spent 65 cents to have the item bound in "green" cloth—which (he states) proved his status then as a collector! He never forgot that "egregious blunder," but kept looking until, years later, he found another copy in the same original condition of the one first acquired by him.

Before attaining his majority, Ray read the Tarbell four-volume "Life" and this accelerated collecting purpose. By 1914 his collection had assumed modest proportions. Then came Mary Marshall, lovely wife and sympathetic collaborator, whose indulgence of his

hobby has been one of the encouraging factors in the various aspects of his collecting activities.

In 1921 Ray met the late Harry Ellsworth Barker, then a prominent book-dealer of Springfield, later of Los Angeles, who specialized in Lincolniana.

It was to his friend Risdon that Mr. Barker presented copy number one of the collectors' edition of Herndon's Lecture on Lincoln, published in this form by Mr. Barker in 1910, and limited to 150 copies.

So now we find F. Ray Risdon, lawyer by vocation, book-lover and collector by avocation, forming helpful and enduring friendships from coast to coast, including many of the prominent collectors and Lincoln students, stemming from the original triumvirate—Robert P. King, E. L. Bangs, and the late Allen H. Wright—with whom he carried on correspondence and exchanged material for thirty years or more.

"Build on bibliographies!"—advice early learned—was pile-driven deep into Risdon purpose. Spencer, Boyd, Fish, Oakleaf, Starr, along with Ritchie, Smith, the price catalog of the Lambert sale, and other authoritative checklists and catalogs, are the tools with which he worked and which he kept available for ready reference. But in his collecting, he went far beyond the bibliographers and unearthed many items never before listed, as Jay Monaghan discovered and so repeatedly credits to Risdon in his own contribution to Lincoln bibliography. And this was when only a slightly-built person could squeeze into the room where Ray's collection was crowded.

In 1940 Ray found, in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, at Berkeley, a printed memorial on the obsequies of John Quincy Adams, wherein Lincoln was mentioned as one of the committee on arrangements. It took him more than two years before he located another copy of the pamphlet, but without the original covers. Then his good friend Harry Barker (only recently lost to the

Lincoln fellowship) procured a photostat of the wrapper which is now on Risdon's copy. Satisfied? Not Ray! Not long since, he acquired a large broadside respecting the Adams obsequies, containing the names of those in charge, Lincoln's name included.

Another fascinating adventure in alert following-through surrounds Ray's acquisition of *Liber Scriptorum*, in full morocco, published in 1893 by the Authors' Club of New York. First he acquired a choice copy of *My Acquaintance with Abraham Lincoln*, by Alban Jasper Conant, which was one of the contributions in the larger work, the separate (like the original) being signed by the author, and the item being bound in three-quarter Turkey morocco and bearing an autographed Judd Stewart bookplate. Later he acquired a copy of the article in magazine form. Then, on page 95 of the three-quarter morocco-bound 1911 issues of *The Autograph* (a Madigan publication), Risdon has reference to the bound Conant item as a rarity, and on another page a reference to *Liber Scriptorum* itself. But did he rest there? Not until *Liber Scriptorum* formed the broad base of this pyramidal structure in his collection!

And this genius for "following the scent" has led to his filling in the missing links in such series as Oldroyd's *Lincoln Memorial: Album Immortelles* and Raymond's *Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln*. He has one of possibly four or five known copies of the Switzler funeral address, and a unique item about the Ingersoll address which changed the bibliographer's dates some eleven years in fixing the time of the original publication of this address in book or pamphlet form. And only recently he acquired a variant of the "Wigwam" campaign life of Lincoln not theretofore known to the bibliographers.

Among other scarce items in the Risdon Collection are the following rarities: Two different imprints of W. K. Bixby's *Lincoln Letters*; two issues of Abbot(t)'s *Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Fish 1 and 3); the Herndon and Weik "Life" in its various editions and in fine bindings; the Cranbrook Press reprint of the Scripps

“Life,” bearing an inscription by the author’s sister to her daughter; Edward Everett’s *Oration at Gettysburg*, with Lincoln’s address appearing within the covers of this item, as an early presentation of cultural elegance, in pamphlet form, the whole enclosed in a full morocco solander case; *Abraham Lincoln*, by Riley R. Ross, limited to 20 copies and bound in suede; Thomas Lowry’s *Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln*, exquisitely bound in full levant; and a copy of the first edition of Vachel Lindsay’s poem, *Heroes of Time*, which is one of the *desiderata* of the Illinois State Historical Library.

After his original error of having a copy of Lincoln-Douglas Debates rebound, Risdon has never had anything specially bound, but he greatly enjoys acquiring beautiful special bindings. Among such examples of the bookbinder’s art may be mentioned: Arnaud’s *Lincoln* (Paris, 1865), in three-quarter morocco; *Discoveries and Inventions*, John Howell, publisher, in full morocco; Drinkwater’s play, *Abraham Lincoln*, in full-tooled morocco, with autographed inscription by the playwright; Joshua F. Speed’s *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Notes of a Visit to California*, in three-quarter morocco and containing the Judd Stewart bookplate; Clark Prescott Bissett’s address on Abraham Lincoln, especially bound for the publisher in full crushed morocco.

Broadsides of rare and peculiar interest—many contemporaneous with Lincoln’s life and death, many of political complexion, others in memoriam—grace this collection of Lincoln memorabilia. Then, too, there are numerous gubernatorial proclamations respecting memorial services and a memorial day for the martyred president, and a complete file of the proclamations by the various Governors of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts respecting the observance of Lincoln’s birthday anniversary, published since the legislative act of its General Court in 1905 authorized the issuance of these proclamations annually.

Books and pamphlets by collector-friends, bearing presentation inscriptions or perhaps the author’s personal *ex libris*; many of the

privately-printed items by William H. Lambert and Judd Stewart, including Judd Stewart's private issue, in two different bindings, of *The Religion of Abraham Lincoln*; private press items, editions *de luxe*, limited editions, and other choice Lincolniana are to him treasures indeed and continual sources of joy and inspiration.

In this library are practically all the basic Lincolniana selected by Paul M. Angle, as well as the fifty single-volume biographies recently listed in *Lincoln Lore*. In it are also more than a third of the books like the books known to have been studied or read by Lincoln, including some of the titles of law books known to have been in the Lincoln-Herndon library. Then, too, there are newspapers, magazines, broadsheets, scrap-books, almanacs, calendars, programs, menu cards, election tickets, song sheets, sheet music, songsters, autographs, coins, medallia, stamps, postcards, posters, prints, engravings, photographs without number including contemporary *cartes de visite* and stereographs; busts, statuary groups, relics, Civil War material, and a wealth of political material, not only referring to Lincoln and his two campaigns for the presidency, but covering practically the life of the nation.

Why, he even has a group of books dedicated to Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime, such as: *A Reminiscence of the First Battle of Manassas*, by William Duff Telfer, in three-quarter morocco; *War Letters of a Disbanded Volunteer*, in pictorial boards and in cloth; *Pre-Adamite Man*, by Dr. Paschal Beverly Randolph, and *Idyls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion*, by Howard Glyndon.

And foreign imprints? Certainly! There are titles in the Chinese, French, German, Hindustani, Holland Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Welsh languages, together with many scarce British imprints.

The History of the County of Lincoln, by Thomas Allen, published in Leeds, England, in 1830, and bound in three-quarter calf, includes an account of the original development of the name Lincoln as applied to the locale of that name, and the *History of the Town of*

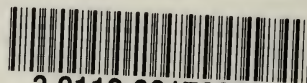
Hingham, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, by Solomon Lincoln, Jr., published at Hingham in 1827, and likewise bound in three-quarter calf, contains invaluable source material.

But this article will have "missed fire" completely unless it reveals to the Lincoln clan that in F. Ray Risdon we have another collector with tastes akin to those possessed by William H. Lambert, Judd Stewart, Henry Horner, and others of similar attainment. He hoped, he prayed, that some leading educational institution in his beloved Southern California would see what his collection could mean in the field of Lincolnesque culture. Occidental College is his answered prayer!



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